

124 of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act (19 U.S.C. 3534).

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
March 9, 1999.

**Remarks to the Legislative Assembly  
of El Salvador in San Salvador**

*March 10, 1999*

To the president of the Legislative Assembly, thank you very much for your welcome and your fine comments. To the president of the Supreme Court, the leaders and members of the Assembly; to the other leaders from Central America who are here; members of the diplomatic corps; other distinguished public officials from El Salvador; members of the American delegation. Mr. President, I noticed you said you would officially certify the results of the recent Presidential elections today, so I don't want to jump the gun, but apparently, the President-elect is here. And I'm delighted to see him as well.

I have come to Central America with gratitude for our partnership, gratitude for the warm reception that my wife received when she came here recently, and later the wife of our Vice President, with a distinguished delegation of Members of Congress, heads of our Federal agencies, members of the White House staff, my new Special Envoy to Latin America, former Lieutenant Governor of Florida, Buddy MacKay, and others.

For 2 days now, we have been seeing and speaking with many different kinds of people in Nicaragua and Honduras, now in El Salvador, about efforts to recover and rebuild in the wake of Hurricane Mitch. We have met people who have lost everything but hope. I have been moved and humbled by their refusal to be defeated in the face of the deaths of their children, their husbands, their wives, their parents, the loss of all source of income.

I am very proud and grateful that the United States, through our soldiers, our aid workers, and our Peace Corps volunteers, our private donations, have had the opportunity to work alongside the people of Central America in the rebuilding process.

The message I have heard from all kinds of people is that it is not enough now simply to fix things which were destroyed and move on; that, together we must build a better life for future generations, restoring people's lives and livelihoods as soon as possible, in a way that strengthens freedom and peace and the rule of law over the long run.

No one can forget that just a few years ago, the people of Central America were suffering from a legion of manmade disasters far more cruel than anything nature can bestow on us. There was a time not long ago when many in this region believed they could only defend their point of view at the point of a gun, a time when civil war and repression claimed tens of thousands of lives and cast many thousands more into exile, a time when farmers were pushed off their land and children were torn from their parents, a time which provoked, in the United States, bitter divisions about our role in your region.

You have worked hard here in El Salvador to shed light on that dark and painful period. Now, all of us as friends and partners, can and must join in building a common future, determined to remember the past but never to repeat it.

I hope the people of Central America now see the United States in a new way, as a partner, a friend, a colleague in the process of strengthening democracy, in reconstruction, in reclaiming your rightful future.

The wars are over. Every country in Central America now is governed by elected leaders accountable to their people. What once was a no-win contest for power has turned into a win-win contest for better schools, safer streets, and economic opportunity. A battlefield of ideology has been transformed into a marketplace of ideas. Decades of struggle have brought a victory for democracy, the only revolution of our time that has not betrayed its principles.

In so many other parts of the world things are different. Nations still short-change schools and hospitals to pay for arms in the vain pursuit of weapons of mass destruction—not in Central America and certainly not in El Salvador. In so many other places in the world financial turmoil has undermined confidence in open markets and societies—not in Central America and certainly

not in El Salvador. In so many other places people still try to resolve ethnic, religious, and political tensions by the force of arms rather than the force of argument—not in Central America. And no nation has traveled a greater distance to overcome deeper wounds in shorter time than El Salvador. You reached another plateau through your elections on Sunday.

A hurricane can transform villages full of life into valleys of rubble and death. But it will not wash away the foundations of good government and goodwill the people of Central America have laid. It cannot, it will not, take away from you the power to shape your own destiny.

All the Central American leaders with whom I have visited have told me that if reconstruction is managed in the right way, if it clearly benefits all segments of society in a transparent way, if it carves out new roles for local government and voluntary organizations, if it reflects the necessity of protecting the environment, then this region will emerge in stronger shape than before the storm.

You are striving to build true democracies in which all people have a stake and human rights are respected; to build more equitable societies that have conquered not only the bitter divide between right and left but the embittering divide between poverty and wealth; to build safer communities in which people can live in peace and have faith in police and judicial institutions; to build a more integrated community of the Americas in which borders are open to travel and trade but closed to deadly traffic in drugs and guns and human beings.

The United States will work with you to realize that vision from relief to reconstruction to renewal. It is the right thing to do. Clearly, it is in America's interests. Years ago, we learned that when Central America suffers, we suffer, too. In the last 10 years, we have learned how very much we benefit when Central America prospers in peace. Our exports to Central America and trade between us have more than tripled in this decade of reconciliation and hope. But to keep rising together, we have much more to do.

First, we need to keep in mind the extent of the challenge just before us, the hurricane-damaged infrastructure that will cost \$8.5 billion to repair. Hope cannot be restored by aid alone. We also must expand trade and investment to restore growth. I have asked our Congress for funds totaling over \$950 million to help restore Central America.

On Friday I sent to Congress a new proposal for an enhanced Caribbean Basin Initiative that would provide for Central America and the Caribbean even greater benefits than the proposal I made last year before the hurricane. It would eliminate our tariffs on all textiles assembled here from U.S. fabric, as well as on all textile handicrafts. It would allow us, also, to treat all nontextile imports from Central America exactly as we treat such imports from Mexico under NAFTA. The only requirement is that all nations must meet their obligations under the World Trade Organization and participate in the effort to create a free-trade area of the Americas.

Now, if our Congress agrees, clearly this will help people in Central America find jobs, market their exports, stand on their feet. It will bring us closer to a day when goods move freely from Alaska to the tip of South America with benefits to all nations.

In every country, including the United States, the progress of open markets is met by some skepticism and resentment. But look at the facts. Hundreds of millions of people on every continent have risen from poverty because finally they had the chance to produce goods and services for buyers beyond the borders of their nation. This will continue if we continue to tear down barriers that shut off countries from their customers. Exports have been the main engine of your country's growth the last few years. They have helped the United States, too. Our expanding trade with Latin America clearly has lifted our own growth and limited the impact on us of the global financial crisis.

As we build a free-trade area of the Americas, however, we must remember that trade has to work for ordinary citizens everywhere, to contribute both to wealth and fairness. We must build a trading system that upholds the rights of workers and consumers, so that

competition is a race to the top, not the bottom. We must conclude a treaty to ban abusive child labor everywhere in the world this year.

But I know it is not enough to keep children out of work. We must get them into school in every nation. Today I am pleased to announce that the United States will provide over \$8 million in new funding to help the children of America start school and stay in school.

I must say, as I drove along the streets of San Salvador today—first, to see the President and then to come here—I was very moved by the friendly faces of people waving to me. But the most touching of all were the children that stood out in front of their schools in their uniforms with their little signs and their smiling faces. And I could only think that our obligation is to give all the children of this region the chance to stand in those lines, in those uniforms, and learn what they need to know to prosper in the century ahead.

We must also protect our environment. It is essential to the wealth of our nations and the health of our people. One of the central lessons of this hurricane is that we have to protect the environment to protect people. It was the deforested hillsides, for example, that experienced the deadliest mudslides. In places that retained their trees, lives were saved.

Now, we cannot stop hurricanes or earthquakes or storms, but we can minimize the damage they do so that every act of God is not a disaster of biblical proportions. We can reforest watersheds and preserve wetlands. We can grow crops in a way that preserves instead of spends the fertility of our soil. We can build more safely for the future. We in the United States are providing computer software and aerial imagery to Central America to tell you where flooding and mudslides are most likely to occur during the next storm, where roads and infrastructures must be rebuilt to last.

But we also can do more. We must join together to stop the warming of our planet. Otherwise, there will only be more of the storms, floods, droughts, and record-breaking temperatures that have caused so much misery in the last few years, not only in our

own backyard but throughout the world. We can do this together, and we can do it without forgoing economic growth. Each year we are developing cleaner technologies and cleaner sources of energy.

For example, here in Central America you have an abundance of geothermal energy in hot springs just waiting to be tapped. We simply must face the fact—all of us—that in this new information age, nations need not, indeed, nations cannot continue to grow their economies by clinging to the industrial age energy practices and land management practices and water management practices of the past. We can do better. And if we do, we will create more jobs and grow our economies faster, whether it is in Central America or the United States. And it is a critical lesson for the leaders of every nation to teach the people.

Each time—[applause]—it's okay if you hesitate on that; my Congress is not sure I'm right, either. [Laughter] But I am. I can only tell you this from our own experience. Each time the United States has set higher environmental standards, our businesses have created the technologies to meet them, and we have actually had more jobs and faster growth as a result. Of course, this has to be done in a sensible way. It matters how it is done, but it can be done.

Healthy market economies, in the end, cannot resist change, they must adapt to change. Like protecting the environment, protecting our people from drugs and crime is a challenge we must meet together. We have come far in the last few years in building a common understanding of the drug problem. The United States has recognized that we have a fundamental responsibility to reduce demand for drugs. The nations of Central America have recognized that drugs cannot pass through a society without leaving addiction and crime in their wake. So we are fighting the scourge together today for the sake of all our children.

We also have to join forces to fight the proliferation of small arms to criminal gangs. For all the deadly advanced weapons technology in the world today, the weapon most responsible for the most death and destruction is not a missile or a bomb but the rifle. In too many parts of the world it is easier

and cheaper to buy a gun or a grenade than to buy a schoolbook or a life-saving drug. No country suffered more in Central America's civil wars than El Salvador. Today, no country suffers more from the weapons and gangs left over from the war than El Salvador. This assembly here can help to meet this challenge by expanding our extradition agreement and preventing criminals from escaping punishment by flight across borders.

But America must also do our part to meet this threat to us all. We will continue to help you to train police forces that can fight gangs and gunrunners while respecting human rights. We have tightened our laws to prevent Americans from making arms deals abroad that would be illegal at home, beefed up controls on our southern border, and stepped up prosecution of smugglers. Together we helped to negotiate an OAS convention that criminalizes the unregulated manufacture and sale of firearms, mandates strong export controls, and requires all firearms to be marked so they can be traced from one end of our hemisphere to the other.

I am determined to try to extend that convention to the entire world by the year 2000, and I hope I can count on your support for that endeavor. Now, if we can do these things, if we can create jobs, lift people out of poverty, protect our environment, build safer communities, we also will diminish the pressure that causes so many people in this hemisphere to leave their homes in search of a better life. Legal migration from Central America has enriched the United States greatly. It has made us a stronger, a more vital, a more enterprising, a more diverse society. But poverty and the yearning for a better future have also brought many illegal migrants to our Nation.

As the President said, people do not leave their families and their homes and risk a dangerous journey for the uncertain prospects of life in a strange land willingly. Most illegal immigrants are not, by nature, lawbreakers. Most are simply looking for the chance to live in dignity and provide for their children. Nevertheless, we must continue to discourage illegal immigration, for it undermines the control of our borders, which every nation is entitled to pursue. And even more, it punishes hardworking people who play by the

rules and who wait for their turn to come to the United States. Therefore, we must enforce our laws, but we will do so with justice and fairness. I believe fairness means treating people equitably, whatever their country of origin.

Now, during the 1980's, many Central Americans fled oppression by both the right and the left. Some were hurt by soldiers, some harmed by rebels. All whose lives were shattered have a right to sympathy, safety, and justice. Many who have been in the United States for a long time have established deep roots in our communities. At my request, following the Central American summit in Costa Rica 2 years ago, our Congress passed legislation to help them. But it did so by establishing different treatment among groups of Central Americans, depending upon where they were from. I will do everything I possibly can to overcome that different treatment.

And I will work with our Congress to write laws that are more evenhanded. Our treatment of people from Central America should reflect what they suffered, rather than who caused the suffering. This is wrong, and we should change it.

Now, it is important for all of us to stop looking backward and start thinking forward about the future we want to build for our children. More than half the people of your nation today are under the age of 20. The same is true in Guatemala and Nicaragua and across Central America. These young people with no adult memories of war will not be defined by the need to take sides in a bitter struggle between two ideological extremes.

Instead, they will come of age in the 21st century with the unquestioned right to choose their leaders and shape their destinies. Now they will use that right, I believe, to demand of their representatives better education, good jobs, fair justice, clean water, safe streets. They will want the things that will give them the tools to live their own dreams, that can help them to give value and meaning to their lives.

I believe we have a solemn obligation to make democracy deliver for them so they will see a bright future, a future that is their future here in Central America. *Juntos para un mejor futuro. Se lo debemos a los*

*fallecidos; se lo debemos a nuestros hijos.* We owe it to the fallen; we owe it to our children.

*Muchas gracias.* Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the Legislative Assembly Hall. In his remarks, he referred to the President of the Legislative Assembly, Juan Duch; Supreme Court President Eduardo Tenorio; and President-elect Francisco Flores and President Armando Calderon Sol of El Salvador. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

### **Remarks on Arrival in Guatemala City, Guatemala**

*March 10, 1999*

Mr. President, representatives of the Guatemalan Government, and people, we thank you for your warm welcome. I am honored to have the chance to be greeted here, in a place that recalls both Guatemala's cultural heritage and its past of conflicts and pain.

And I am especially grateful for the chance to meet you today, at a time when Guatemala is building a future of democracy, reconciliation, and peace. You have ended a cruel war. You have given your people—all your people—a chance to shape their destiny and to stand on their own. You have faced the past with candor and found the courage to move forward. You are teaching the world that no conflict is so bitter, no gulf is so wide that it cannot be overcome by the power of the government and by people of goodwill.

In a few moments, I will have the opportunity to discuss, with a broad range of Guatemalan citizens, the progress of peace in your country. I will reaffirm America's commitment to shed light on the dark events of the past, so that they are never repeated, and to help you implement the peace accords in a way that ensures that the human rights of the Guatemalan people are always respected.

Tomorrow I will meet with President Arzu, and we will join with the leaders of Central America in a summit in Antigua to continue our efforts to build in this hemisphere a community of true democracies in which all our nations finally can prosper together. That is our common goal. *Lo lograremos como socios y como amigos.*

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:15 p.m. in the courtyard at the National Palace of Culture. In his remarks, he referred to President Alvaro Arzu of Guatemala. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

### **Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Peace Efforts in Guatemala City** *March 10, 1999*

**President Clinton.** Thank you very much. Mr. President, first let me say how much I appreciate this opportunity that has been provided for me to meet with citizens of your country to hear about the progress of the peace process and the challenges ahead. Because of the involvement of the United States, I think it is imperative, as we begin, for me just to say a few words about the report of the Historical Clarification Commission.

The commission's work and the support it has received from the government shows how far Guatemala has traveled in overcoming that painful period. I have profound respect for the victims and the families who had courage to testify and for the courage of a nation for coming to terms with its past and moving forward.

For the United States, it is important that I state clearly that support for military forces or intelligence units which engage in violent and widespread repression of the kind described in the report was wrong, and the United States must not repeat that mistake. We must, and we will, instead, continue to support the peace and reconciliation process in Guatemala. As many of you know, we provided one and a half million dollars in support for the commission. We classified over 4,000 documents at the commission's request. Now we will encourage the translation of the report into indigenous languages, and its wide dissemination. Consistent with the commission's recommendations, we also will continue our support of development programs in those communities which suffered most from violence and repression. This year, we plan to provide an additional \$25 million to support the peace accords through aid to the justice sector, to education, to literary